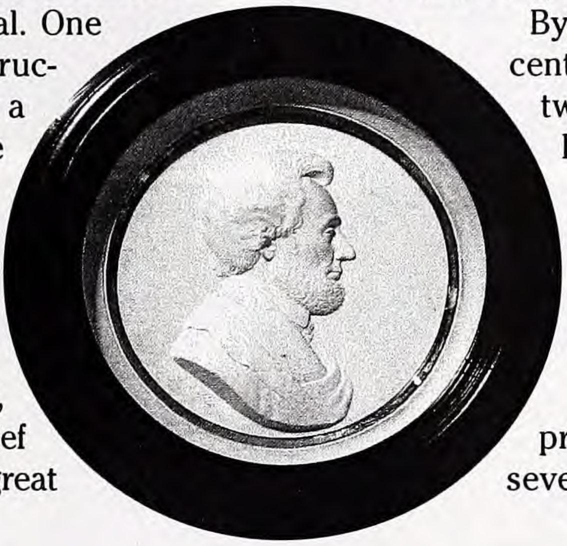
The Rail Splitter

Vol. 9 Numbers 3–4 A JOURNAL FOR THE LINCOLN COLLECTOR **Winter/Spring 2004**

GIVEN IN THE ROMAN TRADITION: LINCOLN AND THE INDIAN PEACE MEDALS

Michael Schulman

In the early 1860s, some lucky Indian chief might have been summoned to Washington to be presented, with much pomp and circumstance, with a silver medal. One side of this medal would bear a peaceful and instructive image of Native Americans gently plowing a field. In the background, you could even make out a game of baseball - played by similarly well-behaved natives. Ah, but this idyllic scene is only an inset. Surrounding these very "civilized" Indians is a depiction of two of their more "savage" brothers, one viciously scalping the other. The message is simple: "agriculture good, scalping bad." On the flip side of the medal, the chief would find pictured the very man bestowing this great gift: Abraham Lincoln.

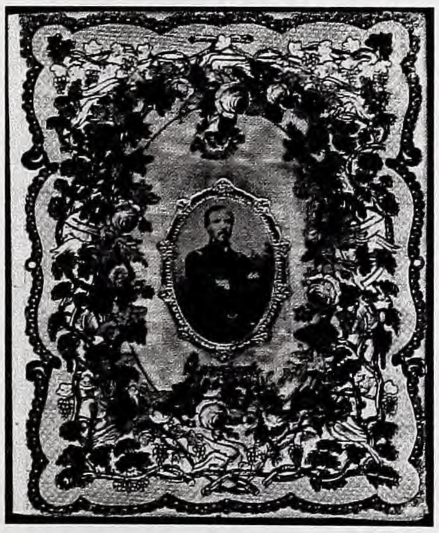

Salathiel Ellis' original plaster mold for his portrait of Lincoln – used in the design of the Indian peace medals issued during the Lincoln Administration.
From the collection of Anthony Terranova.

By Lincoln's time, the tradition of Indian peace medals – given as tokens of friendship and alliance – had been around for centuries. The custom stretches back to the days of colonization, when the English, French, and Spanish would use them to secure the loyalties of various tribes. In time, the medals became a crucial part of America's dealings with the Indians. Thomas Jefferson called the tradition "an ancient custom from time immemorial," the perfect way to honor "the negotiators of treaties and other diplomatic characters, or visitors of distinction."

By the 19th century, the tradition had become central to the often tenuous allegiance between the two races. Thomas L. McKenney, head of the Indian Office in 1829, wrote: "So important is its continuance esteemed to be, that without medals, any plan of operations among the Indians, be it what it may, is essentially enfeebled. This comes of the high value which the Indians set upon these tokens of friendship."

Nowadays, these highly sought-after items present a host of challenges to the collector. For several reasons, the true silver originals are difficult to find. Many became Indian family heirlooms, passed down through generations. Others were buried with their owners. By the late 19th century, when the Indian population began to seriously distrust the white man, the medals lost much of their symbolic value, and many were melted down or sold – often in exchange

continued page 4


Glowing in his new uniform, Robert Cross – who volunteered at Troy, NY April 15, 1861, the day Lincoln called for troops – is shown in this majestic valentine on silvered English cameo-embossed lace-paper. As a 1st Lt., he commanded Co. A, 30th Reg, at Bull Run, 8/30/62. He mustered out as a Captain in 1865.

VALENTINES AND ROMANCE IN THE CIVIL WAR: A COLLECTOR'S JOURNEY

Nancy Rosin

In the time of Abraham Lincoln, even during the raging Civil War, love and romance played an important role. For the soldiers on the battlefields, thoughts of home and loved ones enabled them to persevere. For those waiting at home, letters from the camps were the important link to family, and hope for the future. As a collector of antique valentines and love letters, I have discovered this personal connection, and find it to be a fascinating approach to learning about the actual people who lived during this time. Their story is the human aspect to the battle accounts, and these paper relics become a way to more deeply understand the people who wrote our history.

St. Valentine's Day was a holiday of major importance, and had been widely celebrated in America since the 1840s. Even before that, manufacturers in New York City published lithographed versions, and imported elaborate lace-paper confections from England. Although costly, they were popular, and stimulated the American industry to create their own

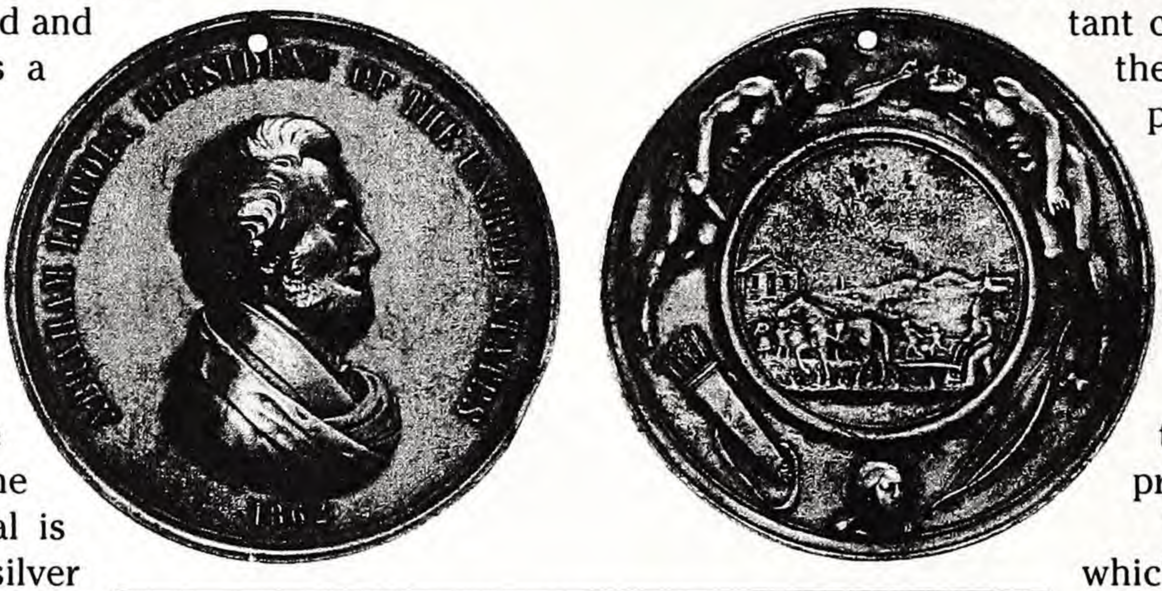
continued page 8

From the Publisher 2
Berry of New Salem 12
Letters to the Editor 15
Rail Splinters 19
Top Twenty Books 22
The Lincolnphile 24
A Priceless Ticket 29
Volk's Aversion 32
In the Marketplace 34

Indian Peace Medals, cont.

for alcohol, which had grown to be an unfortunate staple of Indian life.

The same era, however, saw the rise of coin and medal collecting in America, and so a number of peace medals – many of them remainders not given to Indians – ended up in the hands of collectors. The U.S. Mint, which produced the medals, made bronze copies for the sole benefit of collectors. Unfortunately for modern-day collectors, many of these bronze medals were silver-plated and sold at gun shows, leaving us a great number of imposters.



One of two designs used during the Lincoln Administration. This 76mm medal, with Salathiel Ellis' 1862 design on the obverse, the engraved work of Joseph Willson on the reverse (designed for use during the Buchanan Administration), is that most often found. As detailed by R.W. Julian in his landmark study, *Medals of the United States Mint, The First Century: 1792-1892,* there is an interesting story to the design of this piece:

Despite strong competition from Assistant Mint Engraver Anthony C. Paquet, Salathiel Ellis received the contract to execute the Indian Peace dies, this time for Abraham Lincoln. Only two obverses were required as the same reverses originally used for Buchanan in 1857 were to be reused. Ellis engraved the two dies between January, 1862, and the late summer of the same year. Due to some difficulty in having the medals struck in New York City, Ellis applied for, and received, permission from the government to have them struck in the Mint. The first Lincoln medals came from the dies in September, 1862, and they continued to be produced until the entire order was executed. Silver medals for the Indians were last struck in April, 1863. The reverse die for the large medal broke only after eight pieces had been struck and a new one had to be prepared (possibly by using the portrait lathe) by the Mint engraving staff. The replacement die, however, did not carry Willson's name below the vignette, nor do those medals in bronze struck since that time. Although there was a pressing demand for the large Lincoln medals in silver, the majority were not struck until well into 1863. The replacement die for the reverse was very slow in coming forth due to the heavy load in the engraving department. There is a considerable number of the Lincoln medals around in bronze because it was the only such medal in a large size generally available to collectors. After 1886, however, the public usually purchased the three-inch (76mm) medal by Morgan since it was clearly the better of the two in terms of artistic effort. On occasion the Director of the Mint received sarcastic letters commenting on the quality of the Lincoln portrait by Ellis.

New York *Rail Splitter* and collector Anthony Terranova has several suggestions for differentiating the two kinds of medals. For one, he says, the real silver versions are thinner and heavier than their bronze counterparts. Another clue is the sound created when the medal is struck with a piece of metal; a silver one will give off a different, more prolonged ring.

The bigger challenge may be to date the medals accurately – an all-but-impossible task. Though the production of peace medals stopped soon after the turn of the century, older models were re-struck after 1900 and appear slightly different than the originals. While the blank spaces in the originals were concave, the newer medals made from transfer dies have convex fields. The originals, made with an old screw press, tend to show repeated impressions due to multi-striking. On those machines, coins and medals were given up to fifteen blows during production. The modern hydraulic press, however, eliminated the need for multiple striking.

"You can't tell specifically when the medal was made," says Terranova. "You can make an educated guess, based on when the Mint started using various types of finishes – a bronze finish, which is dull and dark-chocolate-like, versus a deep mirror-proof-like dark-chocolate one, which was made at a different point in time. When they were exactly made – it's really a matter of conjecture." Bronze medals made after 1900 will have a Yellow Bronze finish, a lighter, mustard-like hue.

When the phonies are weeded out, the true 19th century silver peace medals are extremely rare. Significant collections are held by the American Numismatic Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and in Colonial Williamsburg. The medals came in multiple sizes; during Lincoln's time, two sizes were produced. The larger medals often go for a larger sum (Terranova estimates their value between $12,000 and $15,000). However, the smaller ones ($11,000 to $12,000) are actually harder to find. The reason is that the larger ones were given to important chiefs, under whose possession they were more likely to be well-protected and well-preserved. Mean-while, the smaller ones ended up in the hands of braves and men of lesser distinction, who were more likely to melt down or lose their medals. Most collectors, though, tend to collect them by president, rather than by size.

The bronze peace medals, which are much more accessible items for the modern-day collector, range in price based on their condition. A well-preserved bronze medal could go for $1,000 to $1,500, while a less pristine example might be worth $200 to $300. The silver medals, on the other hand, are usually more valuable when they show a little wear-and-tear, since those examples were most likely given to an Indian. Cleaner ones were probably left-over medals given out directly to collectors. The price difference, however, is negligible.

The Lincoln peace medals bear Salathiel Ellis' bust of the President on their obverse, which reads: "Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States 1862." Below the truncation, the print reads: "S. Ellis Del. SC"; and on the truncation: "Patented." The reverse shows that unsettling scalping/plowing image, which was designed by Joseph Willson for the Buchanan administration. Congress originally granted $5000 for the production of the Indian medals for Lincoln's first term in office. Ellis was given working facilities at the Mint. The smaller medals were finished in December 1862, and the larger ones in April, due to some delays. After producing only eight medals, the reverse die for the large-sized Lincoln medals broke. For one reason or another, the replacement die did not include

continued, next page

The second Lincoln medal, this the smaller size. As noted by Julian: *Although the official mint list of medals for sale showed only the three-inch specimen being offered to the public, letters from the various superintendents indicate that the smaller size was also available on occasion. The bulk of the bronze medals in the past century were undoubtedly of the larger size, however.*

Willson's signature.

Anthony Paquet, who had been turned down for the job before, was commissioned to design a new reverse image for Lincoln's second term. However, the die wasn't ready until after the assassination, and so Paquet's reverse was used for the Johnson administration's peace medals. That design features the bust of Washington overlooking Columbia shaking hands with an Indian chief.

Though the genuine articles are few and far between, Indian peace medals make for exciting collectibles. Both silver and bronze tell of the long history – call it friendship, bribery, or manipulation – of America's relationship with Native Americans. While many peace medals remain buried deep within the ground, locked up forever with Indian chiefs who brought them to their graves, the ones that survive above ground are still treasured by collectors and Native American families alike. ∞

A Brief Chronology of Indian Peace Medals

1785: The first peace medals given by the national government commemorate the Treaty of Hopewell.
1798: First *struck* medals used, made in England.
1801: Medals struck for the first time in the United States. These medals were made hollow, not solid.
1814–46: Standard dies by Reich used, bearing reverse image of a crossed tomahawk and peace pipe, with the inscription "Peace and Friendship."
1824: Bureau of Indian Affairs created, took over production of Peace Medals.
1849: The Interior Department takes over production of medals.
1890: Last new dies for peace medals cut.
1894: Old screw press replaced by modern hydraulic press.

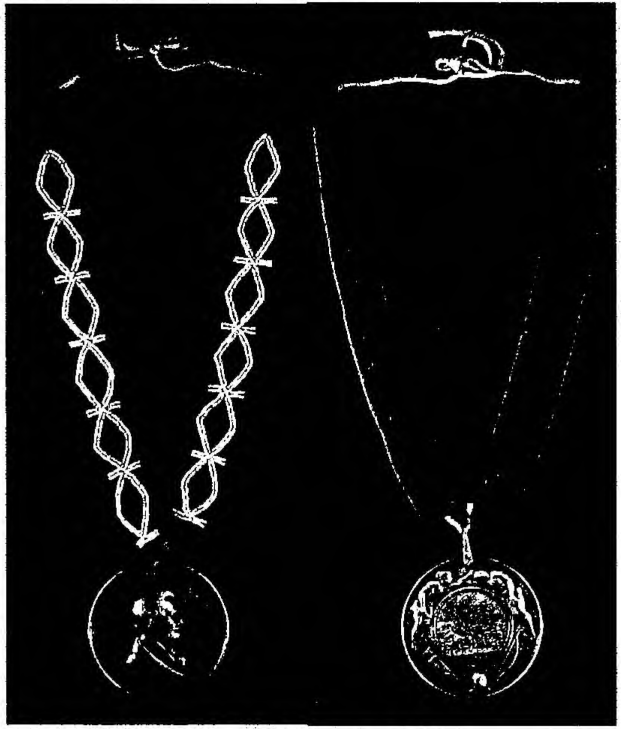
TESTING THAT MEDAL'S METAL: IS IT REAL?

[MEI-Charlton, Inc. is a professional engineering, metallurgical and scientific consulting firm based in Portland, Oregon. Their clients include utilities, pulp and paper concerns, high-tech industries, manufacturers, and various public agencies. Now... you MUST be wondering what they might have to say about Lincoln Indian Peace Medals. Well... actually... quite a bit! We recently learned of their "in house" newsletter, *MEI-Currently*, a publication that features stories such as "Highway Overpass Strain Gages" and "Delayed Failure of Socket Set Screws," no doubt enjoyed by metallurgists everywhere. (Alright... we are having some fun – none of us did very well in science classes... we have trouble just understanding the titles of their articles!) In any event, their last newsletter included the following story, published here with their permission.]

Some of our readers may recall our Spring 2001 newsletter in which we told of our assignment to determine whether a cast-iron statue of Avalokitesvara was of ancient origin or merely a century-old souvenir. (Yes, indeed it was of ancient origin.) Well, recently we had a somewhat similar assignment, this time to check the authenticity of a silver Indian Peace Medal purportedly dating from Abraham Lincoln's administration.

So, what exactly is an Indian Peace Medal? Peace Medals started back in colonial times, when the British, Spanish, and French governments produced silver medals bearing the likeness of their respective monarchs. The medals were given to influential Native American chiefs and warriors as tokens of friendship and cooperation. After the United States achieved independence from England, George Washington's administration recognized the importance to the young nation's security of forming alliances with Native American tribes that it considered friendly. Consequently, the tradition of the Indian Peace Medals was continued, this time, of course, with the medals bearing the likeness of George Washington rather than King George. The practice continued with subsequent administrations, all the way through the administration of President Benjamin Harrison, 1889-1893. The original Indian Peace Medals of Abraham Lincoln's administration were struck in silver, in two sizes, a larger, 3-inch diameter medal and a smaller, 2 1/2-inch diameter medal.

Only 100 original silver medals were struck by the mint, but subsequently, during the next ten years or so, an additional four large medals and 12 small medals were struck in silver, and at about the same time, an additional 132 large medals were struck in copper. Given their rarity, and the ongoing popularity of Lincoln memorabilia, an original silver Lincoln Indian Peace Medal is very valuable in today's collector market.



The medal in question.
Could this be an authentic, period example?

continued, next page

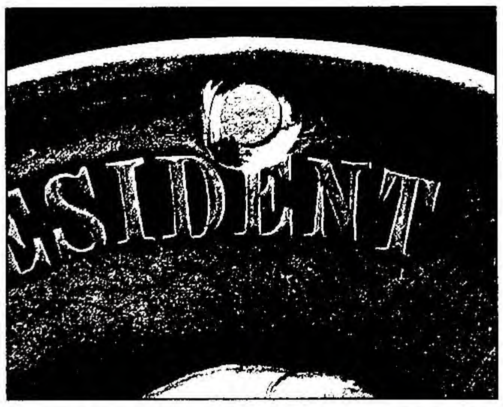
Is the Medal Real?, cont.

Lewis and Clark, on their 1804-1806 Corps of Discovery trip to the Pacific Northwest, brought along 32 Jefferson Indian Peace Medals (in three sizes), which they presented to Native American chiefs they encountered on their journey.

Of course, here's where our story takes a turn toward the shady side of things. It turns out the US Mint has also produced, in modern time, thousands of bronze copies of the medals for collectors, using the original dies. So, if someone were to take one of these bronze copies—which, incidentally, are available for as little as $25—and plate it with silver, and then subject it to an appropriate "massaging" so as to make it resemble a well-worn original, it could be worth a great deal of money, provided the respective buyer doesn't investigate it too thoroughly.

In this project, the medal in question had been purchased by a museum curator and had already undergone a preliminary visual examination by an expert, who suggested it might be authentic; however, he had recommended a more detailed examination be conducted, utilizing nondestructive elemental analysis, which is where we entered the picture. Our assignment was to examine the medal and determine if it was authentic. Oh, yes, and for what are probably obvious reasons, we weren't allowed to cut it up into pieces as we usually like to do for analysis.

Research indicated the original Lincoln silver Indian Peace Medals were likely of silver coinage composition in use at the time, namely, 90% silver and 10% copper. An elemental analysis in the scanning electron microscope with our x-ray spectrometer quickly revealed a disappointing result: no copper; the silver was simply that—silver, with no significant alloying elements. So right off the bat, things didn't look too promising for the owner. Then, after not being able to find any copper alloyed with the silver on the face of the medal, we visually noticed a copperish color in a more incriminating location, namely within the bore of a hole that the medal had to allow it to be mounted on a lanyard and worn about the neck. Obviously, the presence of copper within the bore of the hole suggested the medal was probably a copper alloy, with a silver plating on the outside to make it resemble the original silver Peace Medals



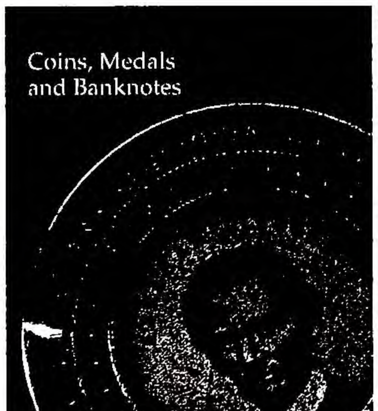
So, you ask, how does one accurately measure the specific gravity of an irregularly shaped object such as a medal? It's quite easy actually. You accurately weigh the medal in air, and you accurately weigh it in water. Subtracting the two numbers gives you the weight of the displaced water, from which you can calculate its volume - and hence, the volume of the medal - by simply knowing (i.e., looking up in a reference table) the density of water at the measurement temperature. From the volume and weight, you can easily determine the density, from which you can determine the specific gravity.

With our suspicions now thoroughly aroused, we proceeded to measure the specific gravity of the medal, which would allow us to tell whether it was just an alloy of mostly copper with a silver plating on the outside to fool the unwary, or whether it was really a silver-copper alloy throughout, as the owner hoped.

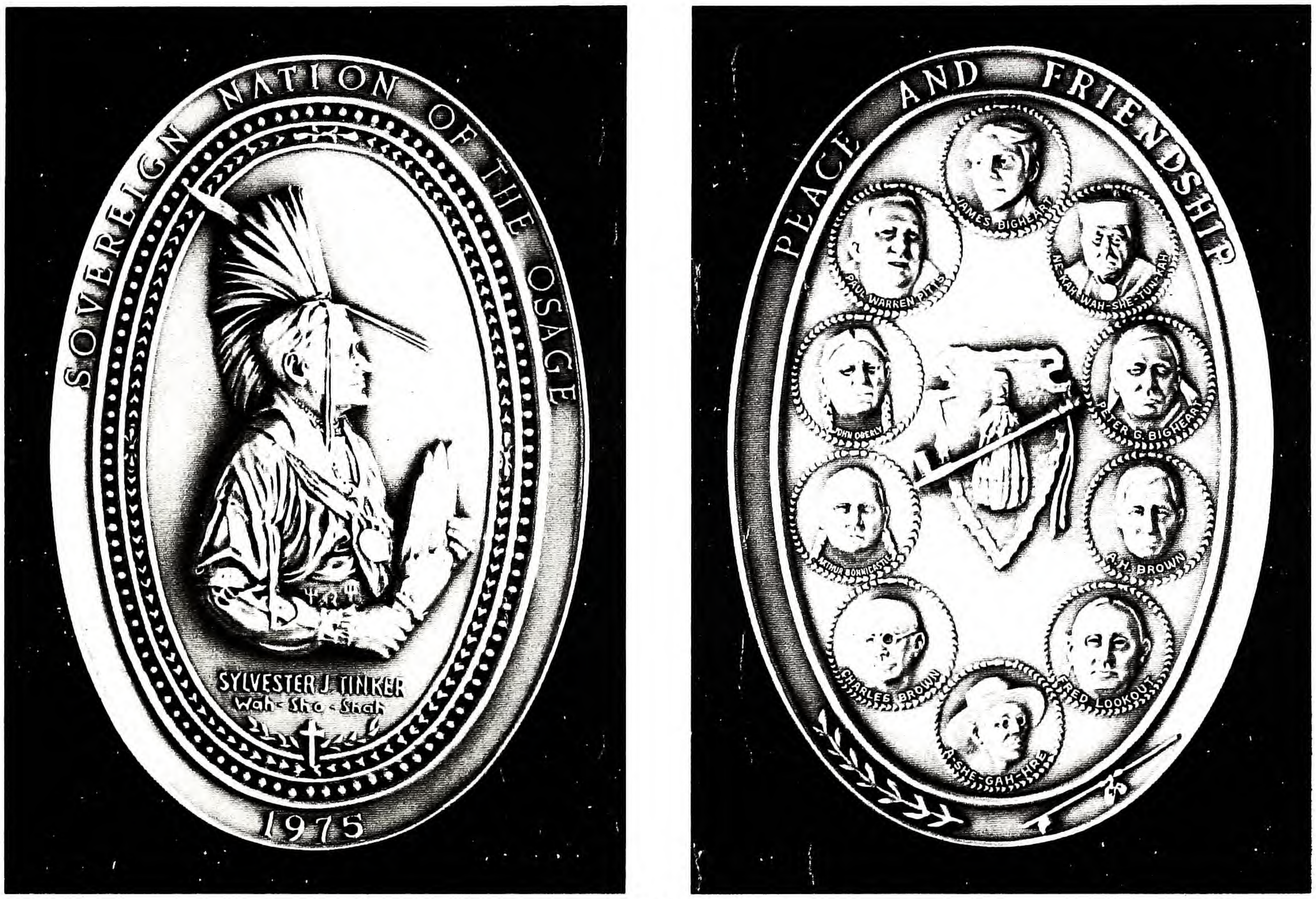
No luck for the owner—that test put another "nail in the coffin" -the specific gravity was almost exactly the same as the specific gravity of a 95% copper-5% zinc alloy commonly used for coinage and medals, far less than the specific gravity of a 90% silver-10% copper alloy.

As a final indication of the medal's lack of authenticity, we noted that while the medal itself appeared to be well-worn, the bore of the hole was not worn at all, showing it most likely didn't date from a century and a half ago. Because the current US Mint restrikes don't contain mounting holes, the absence of wear in this hole indicates that this was likely a restrike medal which someone had drilled, abraded, and silver plated in an attempt to duplicate an original. Interestingly, the hole itself was particularly ineptly done; it had been countersunk, probably in an attempt to make it look worn around the edges, but of course the countersinking machining marks were immediately apparent under the microscope, clearly showing that it wasn't wear at all; not only that, but the countersinking had gone too deep and machined off the top of the letter "E" in the word "PRESIDENT"—not exactly indicative of a high precision minting/machining operation!

All-in-all, it was a very interesting assignment, even if the results of our sleuthing were a disappointment to the owner. On the bright side though, the museum curator asked us to prepare a series of slides so she could present the information to other interested parties as a learning experience on a few of the methods that can be employed to authenticate (or, in this case, maybe we should say "disauthenticate") a historic item.



In the landmark auction of Capt. Andrew C. Zabriskie's Collection at Sotheby's back in 1999 (discussed at length in past issues), a 76mm. silver Lincoln Peace Medal, described as: *a proof striking of exceptional quality, with iridescent toning on gunmetal grey surfaces – very rare* hit the block. With the buyer's premium, it realized $26,400... a "high-water mark" that still holds. Another example belonging to Zabriskie – his very name adding to the provenance and desirability of anything in the world of numismatica – in copper, 76mm., sold for $1,200. [Note: Anyone still interested in obtaining a copy of this important catalog, with prices-realized sheet, can send in $25... a few remain available for *Rail Splitters.*]



Osage Indian Nation Peace Medal. — DOUGLAS K. JONES

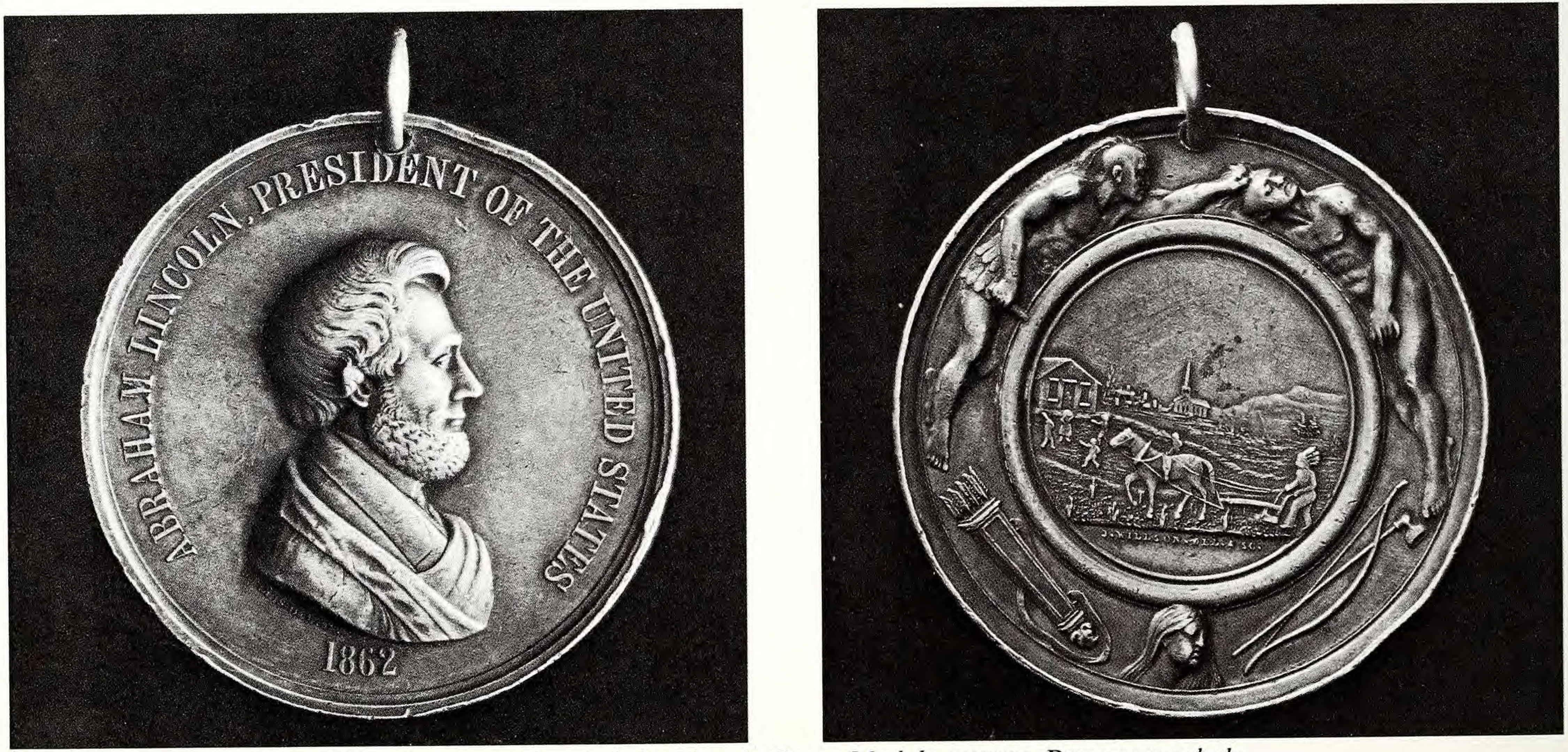
From a very early date the medals were intended not only as political symbols marking Indian adherence to the United States, but also as rewards for accepting the white man's ways. President Washington was deeply concerned to introduce agricultural and domestic skills among the southern Indians, and the first agents to the tribes were sent primarily to lead them on the road to civilization. At the end of his presidency, Washington addressed a delegation of Cherokees at the national capital:

> When I have retired to my farm I shall hear of you; and it will give me great pleasure to know that you have taken my advice, and are walking in the path which I have described. But before I retire I shall speak to my beloved man, the Secretary of War, to get prepared some medals, to be given to such Cherokees as by following my advice shall best deserve them. For this purpose Mr. [Silas] Dinsmoor is from time to time to visit every town in your nation. He will give instructions to those who desire to learn what I have recommended. He will see what improvements are made; who are most industrious in raising cattle; in growing corn, wheat, cotton and flax; and in spinning and weaving; and on those who excel these rewards are to be bestowed.

Washington medals were also presented in the north, where British medals — and before them, French medals — had long been an element in Indian diplomacy. The British had distributed medals in considerable numbers, and American medals were used to offset continuing British influence. The most celebrated of these was the large silver medal presented to the Seneca chief Red Jacket in 1792 by President Washington in Philadelphia. Little is known about the circumstances of the presentation of this medal or of similar ones given to other Iroquois chiefs in the same period, but the Red Jacket medal itself became well known as the prototype of large Washington oval medals. The famous chief wore it on all important occasions and after his death it was passed down in his family. General Ely S. Parker, a descendant of Red Jacket, received it at mid-century. "At my installation as leading Sachem of the Iroquois Confederacy in 1851," Parker wrote many years later, "I was formally invested with it by the master of ceremonies placing it around my neck, the speaker remarking the fact that it was given by the great Washington to my tribal relative, Red Jacket, and that it was to be retained and worn as evidence of the bond of perpetual peace and friendship established and entered into between the people of the United States and the Six Nations of Indians at the time of its presentation."

In later years, as the United States government sought to maintain or strengthen relations with the tribes, the practice of bestowing medals increased. In our own time, the practice of bestowing peace medals has become the property of the tribes and their chiefs. On May 20, 1973, when Mr. Wendall Chino, leader of the Mescalero Apache, presented a Peace Medal to President Richard M. Nixon in connection with the Mescalero Apache Indian Nation's Centennial observance, it marked the first time in history an Indian Nation presented a Peace Medal to the head of a greater power. Before, Peace Medals had been presented to Indian leaders by world governments. On April 2, 1975, Sylvester J. Tinker, principal chief of the Osage tribe of Indians, presented Pope Paul VI with a Peace Medal during a private audience at the Vatican.

— from INDIAN PEACE MEDALS in American History by Francis Paul Prucha, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971.


ABRAHAM LINCOLN, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
1862

LEFT: *The obverse, or front of the Lincoln Peace Medal.* RIGHT: *Reverse symbols show contrast of civilized and primitive customs.* — DOUGLAS K. JONES

Arizona Highways
June 1975 Vol LI No 6